Chatterbox #281 – Do you prefer reading paper or e-books?

Episode description

In this episode, Andrew and Anna debate the pros and cons of reading paper books and digital e-books. They also discuss their experiences with reading online and talk about the daily distractions that prevent them from reading properly.

Our Chatterbox series is the perfect way to learn English with our Culips hosts who discuss interesting and contemporary topics using everyday English. If you want to learn how to talk like a native speaker, then this is the podcast series for you!

Fun fact

The first e-book was published way back in 1971. Michael Stern Hart was a technologist who decided to transcribe the US Declaration of Independence onto his computer and make it available to other users on the network. However, the first physical e-book invented was the Rocketbook in 1997.

Expressions included in the study guide

➢ Mindless

➢ On the surface

➢ To go by the wayside

➢ To catch oneself

➢ Clueless

➢ Workaround

Transcript

Note: The words and expressions that appear in **bold text** within the transcript are discussed in more detail in the Detailed Explanations section that follows the transcript. The transcript has been edited for clarity.

Andrew: Hello everyone, my name is Andrew.

Anna: And my name is Anna.

Andrew: And you're listening to the Culips English Podcast.

This is Chatterbox, the Culips series for intermediate and advanced English learners that features natural, unedited conversations between native speakers about an interesting topic. And today I'm joined by my cohost, Anna. Hello there, Anna.

Anna: Hi, Andrew. How are you?

Andrew: I am fantastic. How about you?

Anna: I'm all good. Looking forward to talking about our topic today.

Andrew: Yes, absolutely.

Anna: Today we're going to be talking about reading. Specifically, we're going to discuss some of the differences between reading with a screen, so like reading on a computer or a phone, for example, versus reading on paper, like printed books and magazines.

Andrew: Yes, exactly. I think this is a really interesting question, like which kind of reading source is better, digital or printed? And I think there will be a ton for us to talk about.

But, Anna, before we get to our conversation, we should remind our listeners about the study guide for this episode. It comes with a transcript, detailed vocabulary definitions and examples, a quiz, and even prompts that you guys can use when you are practicing speaking or writing. And we strongly recommend following along with the guide while you listen to this episode with us today. So to get the study guide, you just need to become a Culips member. And you can find out all the details and sign up to become a member on our websites, Culips.com.

Anna: We also like to give a shout-out to Willow Tree, a Culips sister from California that left us a five-star rating and a fabulous review on Apple Podcasts. Willow Tree wrote, "I have been listening to your podcast for a month, every day now. And it is a wonderful channel for improving my listening skills and also for helping me to connect to the world in

English. I live in California, and it's great to hear the customs about Canada, Korea, UK, and Spain. Thank you for all your wonderful work."

Andrew: Wow, thank you for your support, Willow Tree. Gotta say I love that username. And thank you also for listening and learning English with us.

Anna: And thanks to all of you out there who have been leaving us reviews and subscribing to Culips on your favourite podcast app or telling your friends to check out Culips. This helps other English learners around the world connect and learn with us, so please keep it up.

Andrew: So, everyone, we're going to try something new with this episode. And we're gonna begin today's conversation with a breakdown and summary about this issue at hand, that is reading digital versus reading printed sources. And then once we've listened to the summary and we're all up to speed, Anna and I will chat about some of the thoughts and feelings we have about each of these different styles of reading.

Anna: Perfect. Well, that definitely sounds like a great plan to me, Andrew. So let's kick off then by listening to a bit of a summary of this issue. I'll pass over to you, Andrew.

Andrew: Have you ever tried to read an online article and not been able to make it to the end? Maybe you were distracted by ads on the webpage, by an email notification bouncing on the screen, or even by links in the article itself that led you down a rabbit hole and prevented you from completing the original article.

If you've had this experience, you're not alone. Many of us are skimming, skipping, or speed-reading through digital texts these days. Even though reading on computers, tablets, phones, and e-readers is extremely convenient, is it really the best way for us to consume information? That's a question that writer Avery Elizabeth Hurt asked in her article called, "Will you learn better from reading on a screen or paper?" Hurt summarizes some of the research that has tried to answer this question and the results may surprise you.

Although many of us believe that reading is reading no matter where it's done, either on paper or on a screen, research into this subject suggests otherwise. For example, Patricia Alexander, a psychologist at the University of Maryland in College Park, who studies how people learn, found that there are big differences between reading on a screen and reading on a printed page. In her research, Alexander found that students who read an online text digitally believed that they learned a lot from that reading. But when they were compared against students who read the same text in print, it turns out that they actually learned less. So the digital readers were more confident, but actually performed more poorly.

As more and more people abandoned reading printed newspapers and print copies of books, and turn solely to reading with their smartphones, computers, and tablets, and as more schools around the world switch from paper to digital textbooks, it's important to

understand why digital reading is less effective than reading on the printed page. So what's going on, exactly?

Dr. Naomi Baron: I'm a linguist by training. And for more than three decades, I've been thinking about how technology affects the way we speak, read, write, and think.

Andrew: That's Dr. Naomi Baron. She's a professor at American University in Washington, DC. And she's done a lot of thinking and writing about the digital versus print issue. She said that reading in print is usually more successful than reading digitally, and argues that there are two reasons why this is. The first has to do with the physical properties of paper, and how we interact with it as readers. And the second has to do with the readers' mindset and the mental demands of reading a printed source versus reading a digital source.

Dr. Naomi Barron: We tend to use a social media–style mindset when we read digital text. So think about reading a Facebook update, or reading an Instagram post. You don't spend a whole lot of mental energy on it. If you then take that same mindset that you don't spend much energy and apply it to things you're reading digitally, which maybe is serious stuff, but they're digital, right? Just like that Facebook update, you tend not to read it as carefully.

Andrew: What Dr. Baron just explained is what some researchers call the shallowing hypothesis. The main idea here is that social media is affecting how we read. We're getting so used to flicking through **mindless** social media posts and skimming through headlines of articles on online communities, that we apply these same reading techniques to all forms of online reading. And as a result, our reading comprehension of all digital texts, even important ones, is poorer.

Now **on the surface**, the case for digital reading seems pretty bad. But perhaps it's not as bleak as it looks. There's a lot that digital texts can bring to the table, and we shouldn't be so quick to ignore them. For example, digital readers like tablets and e-readers allow us to change the size and the font of the text, and to have the text read to us through text to speech technology. They also allow for an interactive reading experience with embedded content like dictionaries, quizzes, maps, or links. Regardless, if you're reading from a digital or a printed source, many experts agree that at the end of the day, one of the best ways that you can improve your understanding of a text is to slow down and interact with the words on the page, make notes, summarize, create a list of keywords, and ask questions.

All right, Anna, so we're ready now for us to start our conversation about this topic. And I guess maybe I'll just begin by asking you a pretty simple question and that is just, Anna, are you much of a reader? Are you a big reader?

Anna: Well, Andrew, it's a really good question. And I have to say that I go through phases. I'm very much this type of person, I tend to become obsessed with things and then I leave them to one side. So this is the same with reading. I tend to read a lot more

when I have downtime. So in summer, and at Christmas, those always tend to be times when I read a lot, but I have to say that I do prefer to read an actual book.

Andrew: OK.

Anna: I love my Kindle. I love my Kindle. I don't want to betray my Kindle. But I do think that reading a book, a real book, it's like an experience. So I much prefer that, but I do acknowledge that having a Kindle or any type of, like, electronic reading device is super handy. Do you have any type of device like that, Andrew, that you use to read?

Andrew: I also have a Kindle. And for some of our listeners who maybe don't know what that is, because I know here in South Korea where I live, Amazon's not really a thing. They don't have a presence in Korea. So there are no Kindles in Korea. So, everyone, a Kindle is just a brand of e-reader that is made by Amazon.

And I actually have a Kindle, as well, Anna. And I love it, it's very convenient, it's very easy to find books as well, because I do live in South Korea where, you know, it's really easy to find Korean books, but a little bit harder to find all of the English books that I want, but that problem is totally solved by having a Kindle, because I can always find e-books of things that I want to read. So it is super convenient in that way.

But I have to say that I'm totally the same as you. Unfortunately, as much as I would love to be just somebody who reads books all the time. It is one of those things for me, that does really depend on my schedule. And if I have availability and free time in my schedule, then I love to spend time reading books. But when I get busy and I'm stressed out, unfortunately, it's one of the first things that gets cut out and goes **by the wayside**.

As much as I do love reading paper books, I have to be honest, I do love reading paper books. But I don't think I've read a paper book for a long time, it's probably been several years since I've read a paper book, almost all of the reading that I do these days is digital.

Anna: I do sometimes find my Kindle, that when I'm reading the text, I don't know if you ever have this moment, but I have it more when I'm reading digital books, or my e-reader. And I'll be looking at the page and then I'll be like, oh, I didn't actually read anything. I haven't read anything for like the past 2 minutes. I don't know what my eyes are doing. But they're just like moving and looking at the words, but I don't digest anything. I mean, it happens also with paper text as well, but maybe a little bit more so with my Kindle. And I have a really bad habit of, with the Kindle, like the e-reader, buying new books even though I haven't finished the other books, which is a really dangerous habit to get into. Got to try and finish the book before you buy another book. What about you, Andrew, have you ever found that, where you find it difficult to read digital text or take it in or digest it?

Andrew: Yeah, I can totally relate, Anna, because there's been many, many times in my life where I'm reading something and I **catch myself** after like 2 or 3 minutes and be like, wow, I have no idea what I just read. Like my mind was wandering and I was starting to think about what I'm going to eat for lunch, or what I'm going to do on the weekend or

something and I'm not focused on the text at all. I'm not really convinced that that is connected to the medium. I mean, some of the research that we heard tends to suggest that it might be due to the medium, but I don't know, because that really happens to me whether I'm reading on my Kindle, or if I'm reading on my computer reading like a newspaper article, or even reading a paper book, it tends to happen to me all the time.

And it's just one of those things that is, I think, connected to my attention span. And it really depends on how engaging the story or the text that I'm reading is. If I'm super interested in it, and it's the type of thing that I love to read, then that doesn't happen to me as often. But if it's something that I'm forced to read, like, I remember when I was a student having to read different research papers for school that I didn't really care about, those were sometimes a chore to get through because my mind would wander and would end up taking me hours and hours to read a paper that if I could have just stayed focused, would have only maybe taken me like 1 hour, but because my mind kept wandering it took me like 3 hours to get through it, for example. So I'm not convinced it's related to digital or paper. But I do understand this issue because it happens to me all the time.

Anna: Yeah, maybe you're right. I think it's just something that happens and maybe you've had this happen, you as a listener, as well. An interesting thing, though, that kind of supports this piece of research from my experience is, whenever I have students and they get materials for the course, they always want books. And obviously of course now that we've moved into this age of online courses and sometimes students receive their materials online, so they receive a PDF or something like this, which obviously they can print and a lot of them do print it because they want something physical that they can look at, that they can read. And I found students just love having books to learn from. They love to have the physical copy. Not everyone, but I would say that I would fit into that category as well. If I really wanted to learn something and it's a document online, I'll print it out. And I'll make little notes and I can come back to it.

So I think there is, from my experience some truth in, in what this piece of research is saying. And I really related to the part where they were talking about skim reading. And with all of our digital devices that we have, like, we're digesting information really fast, and we're becoming really, like, skimmers, we just pick the best bits, which is kind of what skim reading is, you read very fast, and you try and get the important parts. So I think I do learn better if I have a hard copy of something, something printed in my hand that I can read. I think that would be my preference.

Andrew: Yeah, I think that's a really common thing. Like you said, many of your students prefer that, you prefer that actually, I prefer that as well. Since the pandemic started, I've been doing all of my teaching online. And when I'm teaching my English classes online, I usually am working on Zoom. And I share the e-book of our textbook with the class while I'm teaching on Zoom. And when it comes to planning lessons, I never open the e-book and plan my lesson, I always grab the physical copy. I like making notes about what we're going to cover in the class. And there's just something about holding the book that is just much better. I make a connection with the content better when I have that physical copy.

I also know that many of our Culips members prefer to download our PDF study guides, print them off, and then when they're listening along with us and following in the transcript, they have the paper printed-off version, and they prefer that as opposed to the digital version that, you know, is good I think for like maybe if you're on the subway or on the bus, and it's not very convenient to have paper in that moment, sure, in that situation, use the digital version. But a lot of our Culips members have sent me pictures of them studying and I've been shocked at how many people prefer to actually print off the study guide and study with a paper version. So I think you're not alone with this feeling, Anna, I think it's something that many people can relate to.

Anna: I mean, what do you think, Andrew, about the future? Does it worry you? I mean, I guess maybe we've grown up and been taught with a way of books and paper. And now a lot of things are paperless. You know, there's this idea of the paperless office or, you know, everything going digital. I don't know, does it worry you at all that maybe in the future people won't read like we read. Maybe everything will be digital and maybe having a book will be, like, a real luxury or, like, a kind of a vintage experience. Does that, I don't know, does that worry you, or do you think it will be different in the future?

Andrew: It's good question. I have no idea what will happen in the future. I think probably will start to develop stronger reading skills that are matched for these genres. So maybe we're in a transition time right now where we're being so influenced by how we use our phones throughout the day that when we are reading on our phone or reading on our computer, we just apply those same kind of strategies to our reading. And that doesn't really translate very well, right? So we're used to just skimming through Instagram very quickly. And then we have to read an article that's important and we do the same thing. We just skim through it very quickly.

Perhaps with better training, and as teachers start to teach these kind of reading strategies to students in schools, that maybe we'll become better digital readers. At least I hope so. But, you know, as a book lover, like you, somebody who loves physical books, it's a little bit sad to think about, you know, not being able to go to a used bookstore and browse through all the old books and smell them and pick them up and see the art and all of the cool things that come along with physical books. So, yeah, I hope we never lose that in the future, that's for sure.

Anna: Yeah, let's not forget that old book smell, which is one of the reasons that a lot of people who like books, they like to open them and smell them because they have that really old, like, vintage smell. Yeah, I agree, I'm not sure what will happen in the future. But I mean, there's many things that have been popping up over the last few years or companies that basically will condense the messages of a book. So if you don't have a lot of time, they're going to give you a summary of the book. That for me is cheating. I'm sorry, it's cheating. You've got to read the book. That's the whole point. Like you can't, like I understand people have busy schedules just but for me, in my personal opinion, that's cheating. I feel like you have to read the whole book to get the whole vibe, the message.

But, you know, we have such tight schedules now as well. So this type of thing has been popping up all over the place about, you know, get the information you need in the quickest way possible. But I think there's so much, as I said before, it's like an experience reading a book. And there's a lot that you can get out of it, it feels like a crime to kind of chop it up and make it a quick version.

So that's not really for me. But I do think it's also about quality over quantity. And another interesting thing that came out of that study that you mentioned, Andrew, was about distractions and making sure that when you're actually reading, that it's quality reading. It's not just like, you know, looking at this and you've got loud music in the background, you're checking your notifications on your computer, because you're not really digesting anything. And for me, I have to have like a specific period of time, whether it's just before I go to bed, because that helps me sleep really well, reading a book just before going to bed. Or, you know, I can't read and do another thing at the same time. Like, that's really difficult. I can't multitask with reading. I don't know if you found that, Andrew, but multitasking and reading is just not something I could do.

Andrew: Yeah, me neither. And I think that was a great suggestion by the writer of that article, to try and just have a reading mindset, right? So when you're going to read, just get into that zone that I'm going to focus on the text, I'm going to turn off my other distractions. And I'm just going to spend the next 30 minutes trying to read and to actually have a productive reading session.

So I know personally, Anna, that I've done a couple of things to try and improve my digital reading. And I'm wondering if you've done any of these things to like, for example, if I'm reading an online article, I have, well, I use Google Chrome, that's my web browser. I know some web browsers have this feature built in, like Safari has this built in, but Google Chrome doesn't. So I had to download a Google Chrome extension, which is essentially a distraction-free reader. So if I'm using, let's say, *The New York Times*, for example, or just any newspaper's website, you know, a lot of these newspapers have a lot of distracting elements right there on the screen. They have ads, they have links, some of them, which are really terrible, even have videos that autoplay with audio playing and stuff. So it can be extremely distracting. And in this kind of environment, how are you supposed to focus on the text?

So this extension for Google Chrome will remove all of those things. So it blocks the ads, it gets rid of the links, it gets rid of the images. So it's essentially just the text on the screen. Whenever I have to do some kind of serious reading, I always just turn that extension on, so that I can read the article, focus on the words, and then get back to my web browsing experience. So that's one thing that I've done to try and help me be a better digital reader. I think it's helped a little bit, at least. I don't know, Anna, have you done anything like this to help you focus more on digital texts?

Anna: I had no idea about this extension that you could use. I had no idea, completely **clueless**. So I'm definitely gonna check that out.

Andrew: I'll send it to you after we record.

Anna: Yeah, send it to me because I've got no idea. I'm out there listening to all these ads, boom, boom. Oh, the worst thing as you mentioned, is when you're just on a website and then it starts playing music and you're wearing headphones or something like this and you're like, you know, it's like getting an electric shock. It's really horrible.

I just read it online and one thing I do is I turned on the brightness on my computer because if I'm looking at something online and the brightness of my laptop screen is really high, I can't deal with that. So I always turn down the brightness or I put on the nightlight when I'm looking at the screen on my phone or my laptop and that really helps me to focus on the thing because when I have, when it's really bright that kind of hurts my eyes. But no, I just try and find little pockets of the day where I don't have much going on, maybe I'm on the metro, maybe I'm on the bus and I try and do a little bit of reading there but it's kind of hard to get rid of the distractions. And also I do turn off a lot of notifications, in general in life because I feel that notifications are just one of the biggest distractions. So notifications off or minimal notifications and, yeah, just find a little quiet time during the day.

Andrew: Yeah, I am the same as you. I have my do not disturb sleep mode on my phone on almost 24 hours a day. It's very rare to find me with my do not disturb turned off on my phone, so I can block off all of those notifications, which really can just distract us.

Anna, I noticed that you're wearing glasses right now. Personally, I don't wear glasses. But as I get a little bit older here, I've been noticing that I love digital reading a little bit more than paper reading, for the fact that I can zoom in on the text. In fact, on my mouse, I have a little scroll wheel on the side, that just zooms in and zooms out on my computer screen. And I find that I'm using this zoom function all the time these days. Maybe I have to get my eyes checked, I'm not sure, but this is kind of a benefit of digital reading that I don't have the advantage of using what I'm reading print, other than, like, holding the book close to my face.

Anna: Yeah, actually, I'd never thought of that. I'm not actually long-sighted, long-sighted is where you can't see anything, or things close to you are difficult to see. I'm the opposite. So I can't see anything more than like a metre in front of my face. So I'm short-sighted. But I never thought about that. But that's actually a good **workaround** for long-sightedness, just being able to zoom in a little bit. And I guess that's why there's sometimes they make phones for elderly people that have like massive buttons on them.

Andrew: Yeah, I'm not quite at that point yet.

Anna: OK, good. I'm, well, this is a look into the future, Andrew, with a huge phone with massive, massive numbers. But a lot of people are affected by that, that kind of, you know, looking at something and bringing it very close or far away. So I had never thought about that, so interesting.

Andrew: Yeah, I think of my dad reading the newspaper when I was a kid. You know, we always had the paper, newspaper delivered to our house every day, and he would read the newspaper. And as his eyes got a little worse, he would hold it up close to his face, you know. So maybe I'm becoming similar to my dad. But now instead of holding the newspaper up to my face, I just zoom in with my mouse on the website of the newspaper and not the physical paper version.

Anna: Clever, very clever, very smart.

Andrew: Well, Anna, I think we will wrap up our conversation here. But this was a fun one. And I would love to hear from our listeners, as well, about what they think about this topic and their opinions regarding digital reading versus reading printed sources, like paper books or physical newspapers or magazines, those kinds of things. So you'd like to share your opinion with us, everyone, we'd love to hear it. There are a couple of different ways you can contact us. Perhaps the best way these days is actually to leave a comment on our new discussion forum on our website, Culips.com. So if you navigate to our website and find the posting for this episode, there will be an area where you can leave a comment and share your opinion right there on the websites. Or you could also contact us through email. Our email address is contact@Culips.com.

For more information about the topic covered in this episode, check out the two sources that we referenced in it, a [YouTube video](#) by the New York Book Forum that features a conversation with Naomi Baron and an online [article](#) called "Will you learn better from reading on screen or on paper? "by Avery Elizabeth Hurt. You can find the links to both sources in the credits for this episode.

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That is it for us today, but we'll be back soon with another brand-new episode and we'll talk to you then. Goodbye.

Anna: See you next time, guys. Bye-bye.

Detailed Explanations

Mindless
Adjective

An activity that is **mindless** requires little mental effort and doesn't produce anything of value. In this episode, Andrew talks about flicking through **mindless** social media posts. He calls this **mindless** because people spend a lot of time scrolling through social media without interacting with the content on their screen. If something is **mindless**, it implies that the activity is also very dull and doesn't mean anything.

Mindless can also be used as an adverb to say you **mindlessly** do something. For example, you can **mindlessly** wander through the park. This means you are walking with no purpose and you aren't thinking about where you are going. On the other hand, doing something **mindlessly** can be doing something without giving consideration for the consequences of your actions. For example, a **mindless** criminal is someone who commits a crime without caring about its consequences.

Here are a couple more examples with **mindless**:

Indigo: I'm going to quit my job. I spend far too much time doing **mindless** tasks.

Salvador: That sounds really boring. I hate doing repetitive tasks, too.

Indigo: I'm hoping I'll find a job where I can work on something more interesting.

Kelly: I've deleted all my social media apps from my phone. I have so much more time to do other things now that I'm not wasting my time on my phone.

Sergio: I thought about doing that, but I like seeing my friends' photos and posts.

Kelly: Me, too, but most of the time I'm just **mindlessly** scrolling. I used to spend hours flicking between different apps.

Sergio: I do that all the time. I can easily spend an hour on Instagram without realising how much time I've spent on it.

On the surface
Idiom

The idiom **on the surface** means to only consider what can be observed at first glance or by looking at the most obvious details of something. Thus, if you only look at something **on the surface**, you only understand or observe the most superficial part of the whole scenario. For example, the sea may appear calm and peaceful **on the surface**, but below the surface it is full of life. Under the sea there are bustling ecosystems of fish and sea creatures and even farther below that is the deep sea, which remains a partial mystery to humans even today. Therefore, you cannot be sure that what you see **on the surface** conveys the whole truth or reality of the situation.

As another example, in this episode Andrew says that **on the surface** digital reading appears bleak but, in reality, it offers a lot of other advantages that aren't immediately taken into consideration.

Here are a couple more examples with **on the surface**:

Raimonda: I'm worried about my sister. Her husband left her but she keeps telling me she's fine.

Daniel: She might seem OK **on the surface**, but in reality she's probably having a really hard time.

Raimonda: I think you're right. I'll check in on her again to make sure she is all right.

Angela: Our neighbour has just bought a brand-new Tesla. I would love to have the kind of money he has.

Janto: Well, he does work extremely hard and he's an incredibly successful businessman.

Angela: If I'm honest, I want his life. You could never be unhappy with all that money.

Janto: It might seem that way **on the surface**, but he works so much he never sees his family. That's gotta make him unhappy.

Angela: I didn't think of it that way. I just thought that he was happy because he spends so much money on himself and always has the nicest things.

To go by the wayside
Idiom

When something **goes by the wayside**, it is set aside to prioritize something else that is more important or urgent. For example, if you are faced with several problems at one time, you might choose to let one of those issues **go by the wayside** until you have dealt with the more important problems first. Sometimes, when something **goes by the wayside**, it may be completely disregarded and never picked up again later on.

Here are a few more examples with **to go by the wayside**:

Itzel: How are you finding things now that your youngest son has started school?

Hollie: It's been great! I have so much more time to do things for myself. Like yesterday I went to get a haircut and today I'm going shopping with my friends.

Itzel: I'm happy to hear it. I found that when my youngest started school I realized how many things I let **go by the wayside**.

Hollie: Totally. I rarely did anything nice for myself when the kids were at home all the time. Now I have time to make myself a priority again.

Luke: Do you have time to send that report to me today?

Aiden: I'm really sorry, but I have so many other things to do today. Can I bring it to you tomorrow instead?

Luke: Sure. I understand. Sometimes you have to let things **go by the wayside** when you're busy.

Roxanne: I'm worried that the government isn't doing enough to help protect the environment.

Yosef: That's because there's a global pandemic right now. It's such an important issue that everything else has **gone by the wayside**.

Roxanne: Well, these issues can't be ignored. Governments need to take action now or it'll be too late.

To catch oneself
Idiom

When you **catch yourself** doing something, you become suddenly aware of what you are doing, saying, or thinking. In today's episode, Andrew says he often **catches himself** thinking about something else while reading. Similarly, while studying you might **catch yourself** daydreaming, but after you **catch yourself** you can go back to concentrating on the activity. As another example, you could **catch yourself** saying something your mother used to always say when you were a child and think to yourself, "I am just like my mother!"

Here are a couple more examples with **to catch oneself**:

Quince: I have this song stuck in my head. I keep **catching myself** singing the lyrics in my head.

Valentina: At least you haven't sung out loud in public. That would be embarrassing!

Quince: Exactly. It's so irritating. Even when I think of a different song, that same song comes back into my head.

Valentina: Apparently the best way to deal with that is to listen to the song one more time all the way through.

Quince: Thanks. I'll try that!

Charles: I haven't stopped thinking about my ex-girlfriend lately.

Owen: You need a distraction. Every time you **catch yourself** thinking of her, try to think of something else instead.

Charles: OK. It won't be easy, though, because tomorrow would have been our 5-year anniversary.

Owen: It's easier if you distract yourself with something fun. Why don't you come over for dinner tomorrow night?

Charles: Thanks. That sounds great. I'll see you then!

| **Clueless** |
| Adjective |

The word **clueless** is used to describe someone who completely lacks understanding, knowledge, or awareness for something. For example, someone might say, "I am completely **clueless** about mechanics," meaning that they have don't understand anything in this field. You could also say that people in general are **clueless** when it comes to understanding the danger of riptides, meaning that they aren't well informed of the risks of swimming in the sea. As another example, in this episode Anna says that she was completely **clueless** about the Google Chrome extension Andrew mentioned. This doesn't mean she doesn't understand the extension, but that she had no awareness of it and was oblivious to the fact that it existed in the first place.

Clueless is used informally, as it can be perceived as rude if it is used in a professional environment. For example, your boss at work wouldn't tell you that you are **clueless**, and instead they might say, "It seems you haven't understood this."

Here are a couple more examples with **clueless**:

Riley: I'm definitely gonna fail my driving test tomorrow.

Winifred: I thought you were good at driving.

Riley: You see, I'm **clueless** when it comes to directions. Road signs can be so confusing.

Winifred: You just need to relax. It's really not as hard as you think!

Brooke: I am so fed up with our new intern at work. He's messed up my spreadsheets and now I'm going to have to spend hours fixing his mistakes.

Erin: Why don't you show him how you want it done so that it doesn't happen again?

Brooke: I have! Over and over again. Honestly, he is the most **clueless** intern we've ever had.

Erin: Just make sure you don't say that to his face!

Workaround
Noun

A **workaround** is a method to overcome a challenge or to avoid a problem. A **workaround** provides a solution to a problem without fixing the problem directly. For example, a person who is blind can't read books printed using ink, but the **workaround** is printing books in braille. Printing books in braille doesn't solve the person's sight impairment, but it provides an alternative solution to overcome the problem of not being able to read.

Workaround comes from the verb **to work around [something]**, which is when you find a way to bypass a problem in order to find a solution. For example, **to work around** being too short to reach the top shelf in your home, you can use a stepping stool, but you can't make yourself taller. In this example, the **workaround** is the stepping stool.

The term **workaround** is also used in the tech industry, whereby a temporary fix is made to a computer program. When a **workaround** is used in this context, it cannot be a permanent solution, as it creates further problems down the line. Therefore, it is only used temporarily to give more time to programmers to fix the initial problem.

Here are a couple more examples with **workaround**:

Giovanni: My phone is a nightmare! The clocks went forward by an hour last night, but my phone hadn't synched. I ended up waking up late and I was late for work.

Uriel: That is so annoying. I hope your boss wasn't too mad at you! Next time the clocks change, you should just set your alarm manually the night before.

Giovanni: That's not a bad **workaround**, although hopefully by that time I'll have a new phone that works!

Piper: We've run out of beds in the maternity ward. Any suggestions? I have two patients in labour who need beds as soon as possible.

Zoe: If there's no space left whatsoever, we'll have to put them on a different ward.

Piper: But the nearest ward with empty beds is on the other side of the hospital.

Zoe: In that case, just ask the caretaker to move the empty beds to the maternity ward and we'll have to put several patients in one room.

Piper: I think the better **workaround** here is to move them to the other ward.

Quiz

1. If you choose to let your homework go by the wayside, you _____.

a) set it aside to do something more important
b) have finished it
c) make it a priority
d) don't spend too much time on it

2. Which word goes in the blank? He seems happy on the _____.

a) external
b) internet
c) surface
d) veneer

3. What is a synonym for clueless?

a) knowledgeable
b) oblivious
c) confused
d) rude

4. Which word has the opposite meaning of mindless?

a) dull
b) careless
c) thoughtful
d) careful

5. A workaround is used to _____.

a) create a problem
b) make someone work harder
c) avoid a problem
d) tell someone the best way to get to work

Writing and Discussion Questions

1. Can you think of anything you've seen in nature where things seem calm on the surface? What is it like in reality?

2. What is the one thing you are most clueless about?

3. Give some examples of when you catch yourself doing something you don't like.

4. Which activities or hobbies have you let go by the wayside recently?

5. Explain why you prefer to read either paper or e-books.

Quiz Answers

1.a   2.c   3.b   4.c   5.c

Episode credits

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